



Coast Guard Flag Voice 47

OPPORTUNITIES FOR OUR CIVILIANS

From both the Workforce Cultural Audit and the last two meetings of the Commandant's Diversity Advisory Council, a number of issues surfaced concerning employment, development and recognition of our civilian workforce. Most notably, the Council reported that our civilian employees often feel they are excluded in Team Coast Guard. It is also likely that any given unit climate assessment will show the greatest disparity of perceptions about the workplace environment exists between civilian and military than any two other groups. As I discussed in Flag Voice 23, the two systems are vastly different, and one is not "better" than the other. Each has its own strengths and weaknesses, which we can best balance to achieve our missions by working together as a team.

To help strengthen the "Team Coast Guard" concept, and in particular improve military/civilian cohesion, the Council made a number of recommendations. I would like to highlight one in particular: the Coast Guard should provide more opportunities for civilians to serve in an "Acting" capacity when their supervisors (especially military supervisors) are absent.

The issue is important and goes beyond military/civilian cohesion. All Coast Guard people should have a clear understanding of their chain of command, and each supervisor should have a plan for determining who is to be "acting" well before the supervisor is not available for work or duty. The objective is to enable the business of the unit or office to continue uninterrupted. Someone must be available to carry out the full authority vested in the vacant position.

Both military and civilians "next in line" in the chain of command should be given an opportunity to serve in an "acting" capacity. The "next in line" senior member, military or civilian, should be so designated. When several individuals are ranked equally, the supervisor should consider using a rotation scheme. The accession plan must be clear to the staff.

This addresses another important issue, the need for professional growth opportunities for our civilian workforce. Those of us in blue suits understand the critical need to provide growth opportunities for our military members, since promotion/advancement potential is clearly a part of our evaluation systems. However, many may not perceive the same need for our civilians since they do not work in such a structured "up or out" system. Unquestionably, the need is still there and just as critical to our civilian employees. They too would like to grow professionally and successfully compete for higher positions of responsibility. Just like officers look forward to comments in their OERs about successfully performing in "acting" capacities at higher grade levels, so do our civilians in their evaluations. Demonstrated performance at a higher grade definitely counts when they compete for more responsible jobs.

Both of our military and civilian members' potential for career growth is enhanced by the breadth and richness of work experiences with which they are presented. These experiences must offer them the opportunities to increase their knowledge and learn new skills. Keeping this in mind when determining who should "act" is one way of building for a future in which both military and civilians are increasingly prepared to assume greater responsibility in our Service.

"Acting" assignments are just one way to provide our people with opportunities to develop credentials, organizational knowledge, and management and executive competencies. Additional high visibility, high impact experiences can also be provided by special projects, assignments to cross-functional teams and interagency groups, and developmental and rotational assignments.

The Coast Guard is made stronger when we give all of our people appropriate opportunities to demonstrate their ability to assume greater responsibility.

Have a great 4th of July!

Regards, FL Ames



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